

TESTIMONY OF MONTEREY COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, INC.
2007 FARM BILL HEARING
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
August 1, 2006

Secretary Kawamura and Panelists

The opportunity for those of us in the Specialty Produce Industry to have input on the structure of the new Farm Bill is very exciting, as well as a privilege. The Specialty Produce Industry is a unique segment of agriculture, one that constantly changes to meet the increasing needs of consumers while working in a production environment of new constraints and challenges. The traditional focus of former generations of Farm Bills is not what our industry needs or wants.

Thank you for taking time to listen to our thoughts on the 2007 Farm Bill. I am Connie Quinlan, Executive Director for Monterey County Agricultural Education, Inc. I have come here today to speak of the vital importance of increasing our citizen's agricultural literacy level.

In the years since World War II, agriculture has become so efficient at its job of providing abundant food and fiber that the industry is taken for granted. Very few of our citizens are concerned when heavy rains flood crops, or extreme temperatures burn seedlings – those realities that reduce or destroy yields (and cause grey hairs in our farmers) – because it ‘does not affect’ them personally, after all their food choices will be available in the supermarket

If we, in agriculture, could change this one mind set - the one that says agriculture does not matter - our industry would be more viable and capable of producing the quality, quantity and diversity desired by the world market of today. This can only be done by increasing ag literacy.

The need to raise the awareness and understanding of agriculture is not a new concept, it has been endorsed by government, agriculture groups and individual farmers for many years. In the late 1990's, both houses of our own state legislature passed a bill to mandate ag literacy education in all California schools....unfortunately, those good intentions never materialized as the funds attached to this were redlined. To successfully raise the level of ag literacy and awareness, financial support must be connected to all the rhetoric.

§ I am a true believer in strengthening, revitalizing, adapting and expanding existing, successful programs. Programs that have survived the test of time, and have the necessary delivery infrastructure in place. Because the roots are in the past, does not mean that the organizations and programs are outdated. Financial support is necessary to stay current and expand to

their full potential.

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Strong, unwavering support of high school agriculture programs is a must! Both vocational ag programs and college prep pathways need to be strengthened at this level. Support at the state and local level for Future Farmers of America is a vital step in the viability and future of our ag industry.

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4-H programs also need to be recognized and financially supported for the contributions made to the positive image of agriculture, hands on learning of basic agriculture needs, ag career exploration, nutrition education and citizenship.

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County 4H Councils are struggling to maintain the excellent programs despite cuts to UC Cooperative Extension budgets. Most High School ag departments are without the means to update programs, provide technologically current teaching facilities, recruit students and hire top quality educators.

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In addition, both organizations reach out to students and communities unfamiliar with agriculture, providing benefits to our society by helping to develop responsible citizens that will be active in their community, work and government.

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Future Farmers of American and 4-H Programs have a long, history of success - promoting strong values, work ethics and the importance of agriculture. They will provide the future leaders of agriculture. These two programs need to be championed by agriculture and block grants.

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County Fairs are part of an established functioning system that has the potential to reach 100's of thousands of citizens. Financial help is needed to encourage widespread return to the traditional ag roots of the fairs, while creatively presenting our diverse and bountiful industry. Fairs should be promoted as innovative showcases of modern agriculture, a connection to our history as well as wholesome, family entertainment.

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Ag Literacy Programs, at the local level, that are sustainable are imperative to increasing community awareness of the positive benefits of agriculture. These Programs must have a strong ag basis, a strong delivery system and the ability to maintain that program long after the grant funds have been dispersed.

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Many grassroots organizations, such as my own, have the expertise,

talent, and the established delivery system to effectively and efficiently facilitate highly successful ag literacy programs. The driving force behind most local programs is the passion for agriculture, and a personal stake in a program's success. Block grant funds would give these programs the means to continue their positive efforts.

- § As a previous recipient of Block Grant Funds, I can testify to the success of the grant awards made to smaller organizations. Under the 2004 Grant Program, my organization received funds to develop our Ag Resource Center. Ten times the amount awarded was raised to complete the project far beyond our original plans. Our vision is for this site to be a versatile Ag Center in the center of California's most productive ag land, one that will be used to welcome and educate visitors from around the world about the abundant, diverse and safe food supply produced by California agriculture. This Ag Center will continue to promote the Specialty Produce Industry far beyond the 2007 Farm Bill.
- § This Ag Center is an example of the possibilities for sustainable, successful projects at the grassroots level. Funds provided through Block Grant funding can be leveraged for projects ten to twenty times the grant investment.

I urge you to include Block Grants for ag education, literacy and awareness through Future Farmers of America, 4H Clubs, County Fairs and grass roots organizations. Increasing the understanding of the importance of agriculture to our health and prosperity is vital to the success of the industry and way of life. Brooker T. Washington once said "*No race can prosper until it learns that there is a much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.*" Please help those that already know of this dignity teach those that don't.

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